

## APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

### 2013 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

**Legal Applicant:** Reading Partners

**Application ID:** 13AC145893

**Program Name:** Reading Partners DC

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

#### Reviewers' Summary Comments:

- (+) The applicant through persuasive evidence has identified the needs that exist in the Washington, D.C. schools. The district is home to the lowest elementary reading scores in the country. Using the National Center for Education Statistics, the applicant reports that only 19% of 4<sup>th</sup> graders read at or above grade-level standards. African-American student's proficiency dropped to a low of 14% with 70% of the students eligible for free or a reduced priced lunch. Only 11% of these students read at a proficient or advanced level. The applicant further reports that the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that students reading below grade level in third grade were four times as likely as their peers to exit school before earning a high school diploma.
- (+) The severity of the need in the Washington, D.C. public schools is best represented by the applicant indicating that nine out of ten students feel left behind every time they open a book. Only 19% of 4<sup>th</sup> graders read at or above grade-level standards. Students reading below grade level in third grade were four times as likely as their peers to exit school before earning a high school diploma and children with low academic achievement are three times more likely to join gangs than their higher-achieving peers.
- (+) The applicant identified the community problem and plans to improve the literacy skills of K-5 students. Struggling readers will be offered one-on-one tutoring to affect longer-term impacts of high school graduation rates.
- (+) The applicant has identified three types of assignments for the AmeriCorps members. They will either be site coordinators, regional site coordinators, or outreach coordinators. Each has a specific role to play for the project.
- (+) Member activities as listed by the applicant include; recruiting, training and managing community volunteers so that the volunteers can provide personalized literacy tutoring to K-5 students who are reading below grade level at each of the 12 elementary schools.
- (+) The applicant provides evidence to support the use of AmeriCorps members to recruit, train and manage community volunteers through explanation of past success utilizing this program model. AmeriCorps members are able to serve more students and empower their community by engaging volunteers with their tutoring model.

(+) The applicant succinctly explains how increased access to tutoring services is a program enhancement that results from the addition of AmeriCorps members. The applicant explains that as recruiters and coordinators of volunteers, its volunteer base will be significantly increased thereby expanding its organizational outreach and impact potential for those in need of tutoring services.

(+) The applicant clearly documents its ability to measure program quality and improvement through independent studies. A study conducted by the Stanford University School of Education is cited and demonstrates significant gains in reading skills for program participants.

(+) The organization documents its capacity to monitor outcome achievement through its Research and Evaluation department. Literacy skills gains and development will be measured through extensive data collection including surveys, baseline skills assessments, and other evaluative mechanisms.

(+) The applicant has listed the various research studies or evidence that supports the community-driven model that the project is using to improve student achievement. The research cited is both current and appropriate for the model that is to be used to enhance and improve the literacy skills of the children by providing one-on-one tutoring. Using evidence-informed data the applicant intends to collect information that will be used to provide real-time breakthroughs and challenges.

(+) The applicant provides clear and compelling evidence on the impact of the AmeriCorps investment. Sixty-five percent of the students who complete the program will advance their literacy skills by at least one full grade-level. Early intervention will not only lead to short-term success for the children in the classroom but to their long-term academic and life success as well. The project will also increase the instructional capacity at the elementary school by leveraging community volunteerism.

(-) The applicant provided little evidence about youth reading rates. They provided city-wide data but no information was offered regarding current reading abilities specific to the targeted community.

(-) The applicant did not provide demographic data to describe the target community of the 12 program sites. They say that their program targets economically disadvantaged, but doesn't offer data to support this.

(-) The applicant provides limited information on what the organization will accomplish through the AmeriCorps program that it would not otherwise accomplish through existing staff and/or volunteers.